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SUBJECT: KADIMA'S INTERNAL SQUABBLES CONTINUE

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Kadima party's leadership wrangling continued in mid-January, with little hope for near-term resolution. Kadima members met on January 21 to discuss an effort by former Defense Minister and Kadima second-in-command Shaul Mofaz to move leadership primaries up to mid-2010. Though the meeting did not conclude with any decisions, camps were clearly split between those supporting party Chairman Tzipi Livni's call to hold off on a primary and those agitating for a change. Earlier this month, Mofaz led a rally of party activists who called on Livni to agree to advance the vote, and he ratcheted up his rhetorical campaign against Livni's leadership as well. The problem in Kadima is not just with the party primary; as many as 17 Knesset Members (MKs) are reported to be generally dissatisfied with the party and are looking for either new leadership or a new party altogether. These MKs are being pursued by Livni and Mofaz, but also by Prime Minister Netanyahu, who sees this as a chance to either bring additional MKs to his party or coalition, or further weaken his chief competitor. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On January 21 the party's House Committee met to discuss whether to move up Kadima's leadership primary, presently scheduled for November 2013. The meeting was prompted by Mofaz, who is aggressively attempting to unseat Livni as chairman of the party. No decisions were taken, however, because the meeting was unexpectedly cut short when committee head and Kadima MK Tzachi HaNegbi realized the supposedly private proceedings were being transcribed simultaneously on the Internet. Nonetheless, Mofaz was able to lay out his request that Kadima's constitution be changed to require leadership primaries within 16 months following an election in which Kadima was not the head of the government. If instituted and applied immediately, that would require a primary vote by June 2010. During the debate, MK Otniel Schneller called for primaries in July, while MK Avi Dichter, who is widely expected to run in the leadership primary, proposed a vote between June and October. Livni was not present at the debate, having earlier in public comments rejected the notion that primaries would be moved up. She let her surrogates - primarily former MK and current Kadima Council chairman Haim Ramon - state the case opposing any changes.

13. (SBU) The meeting followed a rally Mofaz held near his home on January 14 in which 250 party activists joined his call for a party leadership primary to take place within the next few months. In addition to Mofaz, Kadima MKs Eli Aflalo, Robert Tibayev, Arie Bibi, and Schneller attended the event. Mofaz during the rally continued with his open attacks on Livni, faulting her for not being able to form a government following former Prime Minister Olmert's resignation in the fall of 2008, and for her decision to not join Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government early last year. Mofaz further has accused Livni of hiding behind the party constitution and bylaws, which give the chairman extensive control over the party. Dichter, in an interview

around the same time, also announced his support for primaries in 2010, though he most likely would complicate Mofaz's campaign, as his strong security credentials probably would take away votes from Mofaz. Livni's aides dismissed the Mofaz rally as insignificant and stressed that Livni would be open to holding leadership primaries a year before the next scheduled election.

14. (SBU) The party leadership meeting and Mofaz rally represent the latest turmoil in a party that has the largest number of seats in the Knesset, yet sits in the opposition and lacks a clear identity. Running parallel to the leadership struggle is general dissatisfaction either with Livni's leadership, being in the opposition, or both among a number of Kadima MKs. An aide to Mofaz told poloff that as many as 17 Kadima MKs are considering leaving the party for reasons ranging from ideology (i.e. a concern that Livni has pulled the party too far to the left) to a desire for a ministerial portfolio. The aide would not name the members, but Knesset insiders say that in addition to the MKs who attended the Mofaz event, MKs Ze'ev Boim, Ruhama Avraham, Orit Zuaretz, Yulia Berkovich, Ronit Tirosh, Shai Hermesh, and Yaakov Edri are dissatisfied with the current state of the party. These same insiders list MKs Ze'ev Bielski, Nachman Shai, Shlomo Molla, Yohanan Plesner, Yoel Hasson, and Tzachi HaNegbi as strong backers of a Livni-led Kadima.

15. (SBU) The disaffected Kadima MKs are being pressed or courted from three sides. Mofaz wants them to remain in the party for at least a few months so that he can work out a deal for early party primaries, which he expects to win. Mofaz's goal is to become prime minister - not just head of

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Kadima - and his best hope remains with leading the center-right party and its full slate of MKs. For many of the same reasons, Kadima Chairman Livni is working to keep these wayward members in the party and on her side. According to Knesset staffers, Livni is relying on former MK and Deputy Prime Minister Ramon, who remains influential in Kadima politics, and HaNegbi to keep the party unified. Prime Minister Netanyahu represents the third source of pressure on Kadima rank-and-file.

16. (SBU) Netanyahu, via political advisor Shalom Shlomo, reportedly has conducted negotiations with a number of Kadima MKs (reftel), offering specific positions as enticements. Netanyahu, naturally, is keen to peel off some Kadima members and add them to his coalition as insurance should senior coalition member Yisrael Beitenu leave the government at some point. Many Israeli political observers also believe Netanyahu will need more centrist members of his coalition in the event that peace negotiations resume. Netanyahu also probably views the efforts to lure Kadima MKs as helpful toward sowing further discord in that party, thus weakening the Likud's chief competitor.
CUNNINGHAM